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ABSTRACT

A fictional Rhode Island community is used to describe the Local Planning and Assessment Process (LPAP), including technical assistance, and to discuss some of the drawbacks involved in planning and implementing program evaluation and development. The hypothetical situation is based on real experiences of several communities which have used LPAP. Weaknesses are summarized: (1) lack of dedication by committee members; (2) delays in the process; (3) communication problems; (4) lack of delegation of responsibility; and (5) resistance to change. (MH)

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Providing Technical Assistance:
The LPAP from Step One

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Providing Technical Assistance: LPAP from Step One

In the papers that have been presented here previously and in those to be presented subsequently, my colleagues describe the Local Planning and Assessment Process (LPAP) as a well conceived, keenly thought out and meticulously tested method of program development. The process is one which assures that the development of a local school district's educational program will take into account input which is solicited from both school and community based sources and data which are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The efforts of the State Education Agency (SEA) have been such so as to put in place a complex network of professionals who can provide technical assistance in any aspect of the LPAP. This fact coupled with the fact that the process itself is quite simply delineated and logical in nature makes one wonder why every Rhode Island community has not as yet charged head on into LPAP. The simple truth of the matter is that the LPAP like all of its educational brethren have one hidden catch, one little flaw in the detail - it must operate in the real world of public schools. This is not to belittle the process by any means but instead to caution and make you aware that the LPAP like most other successful systems, is not viewed as cast in granite but as flexible and adaptable at many stages in the process.

With these words as preface let me proceed quickly into the crux of this paper and begin discussing two important aspects of the LPAP. One

of these is the technical assistance available to Local Education Agencies (LEA's) who are adoptors. The other aspect is the process of adopting the entire system from Step One. In the interest of brevity I will combine the discussion of these two aspects into one. In the interest of interest I will present these two combined aspects by describing the experience of a fictional Rhode Island community. Although, this community is presented as fictional, much of the data used herein are the real experiences of several communities who have adopted the LPAP.

Establishing Philosophy and Goals

I will not begin at the very beginning because I feel that the processes and procedures by which a community decides to become involved in the LPAP are made up of a plethora of unique reasons. These reasons and the final decision to adopt the LPAP have not proven to be significant in the experiences an LEA has had with the LPAP. In fact, the LPAP itself begins upon the assumption that there is broad based support in the community and that a decision to allocate LEA resources has already been made.

Our fictional Rhode Island community, which will be called Rhody, is a small bedroom community of approximately 20,000 citizens. The town has the highest per capita educational attainment level in the state and is third in terms of per family income.

In 1976 the Rhody School Committee established a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) to identify (based on community input) the principle educational goals which should be adopted for all Rhody public schools. This committee being interested in performing with the utmost haste and expertise contacted the SEA for assistance and/or guidance. Once this

request is made of the SEA there were two avenues which could be pursued. First, if the request for assistance was viewed by the SEA as warranting funds to hire a consultant to work with the CAC then such a consultant would be hired and a schedule of meetings set. If, however, the SEA determined that the needs of the LEA did not warrant extensive consultation then there was available an SEA contractee whose responsibility it was to "troubleshoot" particular LPAP problems. Consequently, here are two of the services which the SEA can provide to adopting LEA's — Technical Assistance and Troubleshooting.

In this instance it was determined that the community needed extensive assistance so the technical assistance route was selected. The CAC met with the consultants over a six month period of time in order to identify and finalize the philosophy and goals for Rhody. The SEA provided a manual which assisted the CAC and the consultant in completing their task. The committee drafted philosophy and goal statements and distributed these to key members of the community and school system for approval. After following this procedure twice a final list of fifteen educational goals for Rhody were submitted to the school committee.

The members of the school committee were pleased with the product of the CAC, thanked them for their hard work and promptly dismissed them.

At this point, the Rhody school committee convened the Needs Assessment Committee (NAC) and charged them to determine the needs of the Rhody school system. The NAC was made up of school personnel and community members who had had limited experience with developing and conducting needs assessments. Consequently, the NAC contacted the SEA for assistance with this phase of the LPAP. The SEA determined that the members of the NAC collectively possessed enough expertise so that the contracting of a consultant was unwarranted in the development and conduct

of the needs assessment. For the development and conduct of the needs assessment the LPAP "troubleshooter" met with the NAC on several occasions to make sure that they had a clear understanding of their charge, what is expected from a needs assessment and how to go about conducting such a task.

In order to carry out the charge placed upon them by the school committee, the NAC identified three tasks to be completed. The first step was to formulate program objectives from the list of educational goals developed by the CAC. Second, an opinionnaire was constructed with the guidance of the LPAP troubleshooter. The purpose of the opinionnaire was to (1) identify perceived pupil needs in relation to the listed educational goals and (2) measure the community's perception of present student performance in the attainment of the educational goals. The opinionnaire was administered and the results were analyzed and summarized. The top ten areas of need were identified for priority attention since they were the most popular in the eyes of the community respondents. This top ten list was submitted to the Rhody school committee for review. The school committee thanked the members of the NAC and promptly dismissed them. At the same time they appointed a Needs Validation Committee (NVC) which was composed of school personnel alone. At this point the SEA contracted with consultants to work with the NVC to assist in their validation of the needs assessment.

The committee identified five major categories which the top ten needs seemed to fit. These categories were then fully defined and existing data sources within them were identified. The NVC working with the consultants identified all existing data sources which might provide

appropriate evidence for each of the categories. Where data sources were lacking the NVC determined what data were lacking and identified or developed the data collection instruments.

Within nine months the NVC had assembled all existing data or collected all new data. These data were analyzed and compared with the results of the needs assessment. A list of six validated needs (i.e., needs perceived to be real and determined to be real) was developed and submitted to the Rhody school committee. The school committee thanked the members of the NVC and promptly dismissed them. At the same time they appointed a Program Planning Committee (PPC). The PPC was composed of school personnel and community members. The school committee charged the PPC with the task of making recommendations to either alter or add to the existing educational program or to recommend a new educational program. The PPC requested assistance from the SEA and the SEA provided direct technical assistance through their Program Consultants.

The PPC first prioritized the validated needs, then identified those priorities of which it would be feasible to pursue. These priorities were then compared with the ongoing instructional programs to determine those components of the program that were related to the program goals. Reviews of these existing components were made to assess (1) what should be maintained, (2) what should be restructured, and (3) what should be introduced. Once these three questions were answered with some degree of certainty, a search was conducted for programs and practices that might address these weaknesses or gaps. Several strategies were identified as a result of this search and this information was used in the development of a program plan. A full program plan including program objectives, program strategies and an evaluation design was formulated after the

PPC worked on the process for ten months. This program plan was then submitted to the Rhody school committee. The school committee thanked the members of the PPC and promptly dismissed them. The school committee then appointed the Implementation and Evaluation Committee (IEC) and charged them with overseeing the timely implementation of program changes and innovations. They were also charged with developing the means by which the entire program would be evaluated annually. The IEC was made up primarily of school personnel. The implementation tasks of the IEC were purely monitoring in nature. The committee monitored the ordering of materials, the training of new staff (if needed), the communications among faculty and administration, the start-up of program components, the progress toward meeting program objectives, and the changes undertaken. This monitoring of the entire implementation process spanned one academic year. A report of this phase of the IEC's charge was formulated and submitted to the Rhody school committee.

The IEC addressed its responsibility for the development of the evaluation by contacting the SEA for some technical assistance. The SEA felt the request was not sufficient to contract a consultant so instead the LPAE "troubleshooter" was again brought in. The troubleshooter worked with the IEC members to implement the evaluation design developed as part of the program plan. The committee began collecting the monitoring information from faculty and administrators. However, the instruments for collecting the summative student achievement data still needed to be developed.

At this point in the process, the troubleshooter directed the IEC to yet another SEA sponsored activity - the Test Service Center (TSC). This unit will be discussed in more depth in a subsequent paper. Briefly,

however, the TSC was able to construct tests which were tailor-made to the needs of this individual school district. Having contacted the TSC, obtained the necessary tests and administered them, the IEC was ready to analyze the data. The TSC provided assistance to the committee in this task. The analysed results of the evaluation were summarized in several reports (for different audiences) and a major final evaluation report was submitted to the Rhody school committee. The school committee thanked the members of the IEC and promptly dismissed them. At the same time they appointed a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) made up of school personnel and community members. To the CAC was administered the charge of reviewing the final evaluation of the Rhody educational program in light of the established educational philosophy and goals of the Rhody community and to make recommendations, alternations or comment on (1) the findings of the report and (2) the needed changes in either the philosophy or goal statements.

Summary

What I have obviously attempted to depict in this paper is how the LPAP would work in the real world. By using personal experiences in helping communities work through this process, I have, hopefully, been successful in describing the mechanics. However, one thing which I did not illustrate were the pitfalls. Obviously, through some of the tongue-in-cheek narrative you see, there are many. Here are only a few:

1. Committee members are not so taken with school committee appointment to a standing committee that they will perform their task with the utmost dedication and haste.
2. The timelines drawn must be at best rough guides and not expected to be strictly adhered to.

3. The process of communicating the products of these committees to different audiences is cumbersome and time consuming.
4. It is difficult getting school personnel who have just been "attacked" in a needs assessment to realize that perceived needs and actual needs may be two different things. If a perceived need says one thing and the reality of the situation is something else, perhaps this is symptomatic of a communication problem and not an educational problem.
5. Even though you say to committee members that they themselves are not expected to do all the work but instead to delegate some of the work to subordinates, the delegation may not occur and the work may consequently not occur.
6. As in any change process where an innovation is being introduced, there are some who will accept the innovation and there are others who will resist. The implementation of any new program will meet with some level of resistance. Therefore, it might be wise if the alterations in the current program be minor and subversive to be stretched over several school years rather than major and direct to be implemented in one or two years.
7. A key question asked by all who volunteer or are volunteered to participate in any of the committees is "How long am I committed for?" and "How much do you expect me to do?" Neither of these questions can be answered at the outset of the process. Often the inability to answer these questions leads to disinterest or apathy.